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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN SHUI-BIAN'S TRANSITS IN THE
UNITED STATES

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's dailies gave significant reporting and editorial coverage May 3 to the details of President Chen Shui-bian's transits in the United States. With the exception of the mass-circulation "Apple Daily," all papers reported on their front page that Chen may postpone his departure for a trip to Paraguay and Costa Rica due to haggling with Washington over his transit sites in the U.S. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, ran a banner headline on its front page that read: "At the Critical Moment When [Washington] Is Mediating the Iranian Nuclear Crisis, the United States Decides to Allow Bian Pure Transits [in the U.S.]" The "Apple Daily," on the other hand, ran a color banner headline on its page two that said: "The United States Rudely Makes Things Difficult [for Chen]; Bian Gets Insulted on His Trip Overseas." The front-page headline of the pro-unification "United Daily News" said "A Big Setback: The United States Does Not Allow Bian to Transit in the U.S. Mainland," while the front-page news story of the pro-status quo "China Times" read: "The United States Allows Bian to Transit in Hawaii and Alaska." The "United Daily News" also ran a news story on its page two with the headline: "The United States Has Had Enough of Bian's Playing [the Tricks of] 'Cutting One's Feet to Fit the Shoes' [i.e. Chen has been trying to gain his own political benefits at the expense of U.S.-Taiwan relations]."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, the "Free Talk" column in the "Liberty Times" firmly told Washington that Taiwan will not be crushed under pressure and that it is against the U.S. founding spirit and its long-term interests if it tries to put pressure on Taiwan when the latter is suppressed by China. An "Apple Daily" editorial said Chen will not lose no matter whether he gets to transit in the United States or not - that is, he can upset China if he is allowed to transit in the United States, and he can win the pro-Green voters' support if he gets insulted for failing to transit in the continental U.S. Columnist Antonio Chiang, however, said in the "Apple Daily" that Washington's humiliation of Chen will be shared by all the Taiwan people. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" urged Taiwan to restrain itself from conducting 'stopover diplomacy' and to put the focus of its diplomatic enterprise on allies that have official ties with Taiwan. A "United Daily News" editorial, however, called Washington's way of handling Chen's transits a big slap in Chen's face and a severe blow to Taipei-Washington ties. A "China Times" news analysis said Taiwan's space in the international community is quickly squeezed under attacks from both the United States and China. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" urged Chen to quickly repair Taiwan's relations with Washington. End summary.

A) "Taiwan Will Not Be Crushed Under Pressure"

The "Free Talk" column in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] wrote (5/3):

"... The series of [diplomatic] gaffes that happened during [Chinese President] Hu Jintao's recent trip to the United States upset China, which, instead, vent its anger by suppressing Taiwan. China's Foreign Ministry demanded that the U.S. government disallow President Chen to transit [in the United States] and its bottom line is that A-bian must not set foot on the U.S. mainland. China also falsely accused A-bian for attempting to promote Taiwan independence in the United States.

"China's attempts evidently succeeded. Even though the Bush administration agreed with Chen's transits, it did not allow him to transit in the U.S. mainland. Such a development has again made the Taiwan people feel China's rudeness and barbarity, and we are very sorry to learn about the United States' succumbing to the interests of international reality and failure to stick to its principle!

"Today, history repeats itself again. We want to formally inform the United States that Taiwan and the United States share common faith in democracy and share long-term interests. Taiwan will not be crushed under pressure. It is not only against the U.S. founding spirits but also its long-term interests if it tries to put pressure on Taiwan when the latter is suppressed by China!"

B) "Striving for Embarrassment Diplomacy"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] editorialized (5/3):

"... For bian, he can upset China and sow discord between Washington and Beijing if he succeeds in making stopovers [in the United States]. If he gets insulted for his transits, the pro-Green voters in Taiwan that are originally not close to Chen will share the same feelings as his and will increase their support for him and the DPP. As a result, if judging from a brighter perspective, Chen will not

loss in either situation. Besides, over the past few years, Taiwan has successfully kidnapped the United States, forcefully making it to confront China in order to protect Taiwan's democracy and strategic position. Thus, despite the fact that Washington dislikes Chen, it has to let him transit in the U.S. Washington is concerned that if it keeps pushing Chen into a corner, he will react drastically and make it more difficult for the United States to manage the situation. ...

"On the surface, Chen looks like he is insulted this time. But it is really strange that Taiwan insists on overstressing [the President's] transits as the core of his trip overseas while the countries that he visits seem to become less important. Perhaps the United States does not intend to insult Chen; instead, Taiwan's weird way of handling diplomacy can easily humiliate the island itself."

C) "Insult Diplomacy"

Columnist Antonio Chiang noted in his column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] (5/3):

"A-bian's plan to stop over in the United States has been delayed [by Washington] with all sorts of excuses until there is no time left for Taiwan to make proper arrangements. Even though Taiwan has no formal diplomatic ties with the United States, Washington's move is deliberately aimed at humiliating A-bian. ... [U.S. President George W.] Bush does not want to give Bian face this time, and many people blame it on Bian. But as the head of the state, when A-bian is humiliated, the humiliation is shared by all the Taiwan people. ..."

D) "Getting the Priorities Right"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (5/3):

"Today, President Chen Shui-bian is scheduled to depart for Paraguay

and Costa Rica for a 10-day state visit. But on the eve of his departure, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidential Office have not been able to confirm Chen's transit stop in the US en route to these allies. This is not the first time a Taiwanese head of state has faced this kind of situation, but it nevertheless goes against the spirit of Taiwan-US relations and violates diplomatic etiquette. It is regrettable that the US has showed no respect for Taiwan by making it difficult for Chen to stop in the US. ...

"Perhaps the US is still annoyed with Chen over his decision to cease the functions of the National Unification Council and the application of its guidelines, and is showing its displeasure. Because Taipei and Washington reached a consensus on this issue through diplomatic negotiations, and because Chen agreed to 'cease' rather than 'terminate' the NUC as well as its guidelines, it seems petty of the US to act in this way. ... The US is dragging its feet in preventing Chen from passing through New York as a sop to Beijing in the wake of these gaffes, observers claim. However, the gaffes and Chen's trip are unrelated and should not be linked. ... The government must restrain itself when conducting this 'stopover diplomacy,' putting the focus of its diplomatic enterprise on allies that have official ties with Taiwan. ..."

E) "A Mudslide Erupted Between Taiwan and the United States: Bush's Penalty, a Shame for Chen Shui-bian!"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (5/3):

"The United States granted President Chen Shui-bian a treatment that allows him 'to get [his plane] refueled but not enter [the United States];' this is an alternative that is unacceptable for Chen in terms of his personal dignity and national reputation. ... This is not simply a severe setback for Chen's personal political career but also an unprecedented heavy blow to Taipei-Washington Relations. ...

"Chen should be held fully responsible for making such a mistake. He misestimated the situation and his own limited strength, trying to push and bump against the bottom line of Washington-Beijing-Taipei relations that should not be easily tested and use such actions as a bargaining chip for his attempt to play up the political struggles inside Taiwan. In the end, [he] has not only inflicted a severe blow on the trust between Washington and Taipei but has also made the political ambiance inside Taiwan deteriorate because of his decision to 'cease the functions of the National Unification Council (NUC).' The 'cessation of the NUC' itself thus became a self-orchestrated and totally meaningless political farce. ...

"Now, Bush is akin to telling Chen: there is no way Chen can maintain Taipei-Washington relations without credibility and shared responsibilities! The United States will not accept a policy that allows Taiwan to toy with independence but has the United States shoulder the risks [of such a move]. It is such a pity that this seems to be exactly Chen's international perception and political illusion. ... Bush's political penalty toward Chen not only tells [Taiwan] that Chen's Taiwan independence route is less hopeful than before but also gives Chen, who has lost his credibility, a big slap in the face! ..."

F) "U.S. and China Attack Bian's and Su's Diplomatic Visits from Both Sides"

Journalist Chiang Hui-ying said in a news analysis in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (5/3):

"President Chen was forced to postpone his transits [in the United States] while Premier Su Tseng-chang was turned down for his planned visit to Haiti. These two issues seem totally irrelevant on the surface, but they both are results from the same impasse if one gets to the bottom of it: that is, Taiwan's decision to cease the functions of the National Unification Council and the [diplomatic] gaffes Beijing experienced during the U.S.-China summit have made Washington decide to handle China's displeasure more prudently. Under the attacks by China and the United States from both sides, Taiwan's space in the international community was suddenly squeezed and the island quickly fell into the frustrated diplomatic low tide.

..."

G) "Chen's U.S. Transit Woes Reflect Need to Repair Ties"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post"
[circulation: 30,000] editorialized (5/3):

"... Washington's unwillingness to follow that friendly tradition in processing Chen's transit request this time obviously was a reflection of its dissatisfaction with his recent stubborn refusal to back off from his provocative plan to scrap the unification guidelines with China. During the month-long diplomatic tensions, Washington had tried again and again to reach a compromise with him to save his face. But he remained defiant until the last minute when it issued him an ultimatum. The only way for Chen to repair his Washington relations now is to restore the confidence of policy makers there by ensuring that there will be no more 'surprises' in addressing cross-strait relations in the future."

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